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(MAJ NICHOLLS)

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SUBJECT: Media Reaction: Dr. Rice's reported comments on
Bangladesh; Dhaka

Summary: English language newspaper "The Daily Star" opinion column responds to prior day's column "Motivated Journalism Troubling Bangladesh." People have every right to know what our friends and donors think about us. There is no doubt that the U.S. is one of the greatest friends of Bangladesh. The wire services just informed the people of the opinions of the U.S. government. The news agencies performed a great job in enabling the people and the government to know the U.S. government view about Bangladesh.

Dr. Rice's reported comments on Bangladesh

"Media Bashing: A Troubling Syndrome"

Independent English language "The Daily Star" opinion column (03/30/05) says:

The article "Motivated journalism troubling Bangladesh" drew my attention. Going through the article, it seems that the writer has joined the bandwagon of media bashing in this country.

I read all the news items referred to in the article, which also gave some quotes from the sources of the news items. After going through the quotes, I did not find anything that can be termed as "motivated" in the negative sense. Journalists should have some sort of motivation, which must be for truth and for the greater cause of the people and the nation. Without motivation for truth, a journalist cannot be a true journalist; rather he or she would be turned into a public relations officer. The recent media bashing by the ministers and bureaucrats expose their intention that journalists should become Public Relations Officers for the country.

The headline of the article in the first sight gave an impression that the news items released by BDNEWS (a privately-owned wire service) and UNB (United News of Bangladesh, a privately-owned wire service) were the distortions of the statements made by the sources. However, the article itself carries the truth that the two independent news agencies did not distort the statements. They just reproduced the statements with necessary paraphrasing. Then what was the fault of the two agencies? The only "sin" they committed is the reproduction of the news item in the country's news media enabling the people to know about the sentiments of the US Secretary of State and the Indian External Affairs Minister. The notion seems to be: "The foreign media carried their opinions, no problem, as the country's people do not have access to those media. But why you people dug it out and circulated in our media?" No doubt the news items irked the government high-ups substantially when the country (or at least the government) is suffering from a serious image crisis. But the government neither came up with a rejoinder to the news items nor lodged any formal protest to the statements. That means the items released by the two agencies were based on fact and truth.

As the government is oath-bound to protect the interests of the people and the nation, the journalists have also the responsibility to keep the people informed about what is going on against their interests. When foreigners perceive an ill notion about our country and people mainly for the misdeeds and mistakes of the ruling class and bureaucrats, it is the duty of the press to inform people how they are being demeaned before the world and by whom.

The image of the government and the interests of the people are two conflicting issues, hanging on opposite poles. When we say ours is a corrupt country, it simply means that our government machinery is corrupt. The general public has no relation with this corruption. People naturally want that the press unearth the corruption, whereas such revelation would definitely tarnish the image of the government. So, the government's perception about the press remains always negative.

In the India Today interview, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, "There is more that we probably need to do on Bangladesh, which is, I think, a place that is becoming quite troubling" and BDNEWS in the first line of

its news item wrote: "U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said Bangladesh is becoming quite troubling." Giving the quotes of both the statements of Rice and the BDNEWS story, the author said, "What a distortion of facts!" Where is the distortion? It is beyond my understanding, and I think, also of the other readers, where the distortions have taken place.

The author wrote about "motivated journalism." Who is motivated? Our press or the Indian press? About what the Indian press said, I have nothing to say, and I think the author also did not point his finger at the Indian press. Then, how did our two independent news agencies become the greatest friends of Bangladesh? The BDNEWS and UNB just the "motivated" ones? Did they themselves produce the stories? No, they did not produce anything on their own. Is it a sin to reveal to our people what others are thinking about us? People have every right to know what our friends and donors think about us. There is no doubt that the U.S. is one of informed the people of the opinions of the U.S. government. Is this distorted journalism? I think the news agencies performed a great job in enabling the people and the government to know the U.S. government view about us. Instead of bashing the media, the government should thank them for discharging their duty excellently, which can help the government undertake corrective measures.

The reasons behind the heartburn of the ruling class and the bureaucrats are easily understandable. Whenever a donor or foreign diplomat passes negative remarks, the blame goes on the government. The government is perhaps more worried about its vote bank than the welfare of the people. So, whenever anything negative comes out in the press, the government jumps on the press.

Nothing seems to be wrong for the ministers and bureaucrats when they tarnish the country's image by their deeds. But the government machinery joins in the chorus of criticism of the media when those are made public through the press.

Chammas